

*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks***NEWS**

FWP Headquarters • 1420 E. 6th Ave. • Helena, MT 59620-0701
Phone: 406-444-2535 • Fax: 406-444-4952 • Website: fwp.mt.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**March 21, 2013****Contact: Ron Aasheim • 406-444-4038 • raasheim@mt.gov****FWP News For March 21, 2013**

- FWP Releases Minimum Wolf Count for 2012
- Q&A: 2012-13 Wolf Hunting & Trapping Seasons
- 2012 Montana Wolf Hunting Season Report (Attached PDF)

FWP RELEASES MINIMUM WOLF COUNT FOR 2012

At least 625 wolves inhabited Montana at the end of 2012 according to state wildlife managers preparing the federally required annual wolf conservation and management report.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' complete report, which is expected to be available online at fwp.mt.gov by April 12, will show that Montana's verified minimum wolf count decreased more than four percent in 2012, compared to a 15 percent increase in 2011 and an eight percent increase in 2010. The minimum wolf count is the number of wolves actually verified by FWP wolf specialists.

The minimum numbers verified by FWP at the end of 2012 include 625 wolves, in 147 packs, and 37 breeding pairs. While it's the first time since 2004 that the minimum count has decreased, Montana's minimum wolf pack and breeding pairs estimates increased slightly from 2011. The 2012 calculation, however, doesn't include the 95 wolves taken by hunters and trappers between Jan. 1 and Feb. 28 of this year.

"We're making some progress," said FWP Director Jeff Hagener. "Confirmed livestock loss has been on a general downward trend since 2009, and we have more tools now for affecting wolf populations. In some areas, where hunting, trapping and livestock-depredation removals have been effective, it looks like the wolf population's growth has been curbed this year. In other areas the population may be leveling off, but we have more work to do. There are still places where we need to manage for a better balance among other Montana wildlife and with Montana's livestock producers and their families."

For the purpose of reporting minimum counts to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana is divided into three areas that reflect the former gray wolf federal recovery zones. The zones overlap and include more than one FWP region. Here's a summary of the 2012 minimum counts verified for those areas:

- The "Northwest Montana" area is located north of U.S. Highway 12 and Interstate-90 from the Idaho border east to I-15 along the Rocky Mountain Front. In this part of the state, where packs tend to be more remote and hunter and trapper access is generally more limited, counts showed 400 wolves in 100 verified packs and 25 breeding pairs, compared to 372, 85, and 23 respectively in 2011. An exception to this general upward trend was in the middle Clark Fork and Blackfoot areas where wolf numbers are similar to last year.
- The Montana portion of the "Central Idaho" area includes the portion of western Montana that lies south of U.S. Highway 12 and I-90, and west of I-15. In these broad valleys and ranchlands, FWP verified 93 wolves in 23 packs, with four breeding pairs, down from 147, 23, and seven respectively in 2011. This overall decrease in minimum counts reflects harvest and wolf removals in response to confirmed livestock losses in the Big Hole in recent years. In contrast, the Upper Bitterroot portion of this recovery area continues to support a stable count and number of packs.
- The Montana portion of the "Greater Yellowstone" area includes southern Montana, east of I-15 and south of I-90. Verified wolf counts here have been stable over the past five years, with 132 wolves in 24 packs, and eight breeding pairs counted in 2012, compared to 134, 22, and nine respectively in 2011.

Hagener said 175 wolves were taken by hunters and trappers in the 2012 calendar year, compared to 121 taken by hunters in 2011. The 95 wolves harvested in 2013 as a result of the hunting and trapping seasons that concluded Feb. 28, will be considered in the 2013 minimum wolf counts.

A total of 108 wolves were removed through agency control efforts in 2012 to prevent further livestock loss and by private citizens who caught wolves chasing or attacking livestock, up from 64 in 2011.

Confirmed livestock depredations due to wolves included 67 cattle, 37 sheep, one dog, two horses and one llama in 2012. Cattle losses in 2012 were the lowest recorded in the past six years.

"We've taken a more aggressive approach to wolf-related livestock loss in recent years and this combined with regulated hunting and trapping is lowering livestock conflicts in some areas," Hager said. "We'll continue to work to minimize loss for our livestock producers."

The minimum federal recovery goal for wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains was set at a minimum of 30 breeding pairs—successfully reproducing wolf packs—and a minimum of 300 individual wolves for at least three consecutive years and well distributed throughout the recovery area of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho. The goal was achieved in 2002.

The recovery of the wolf in the northern Rockies remains one of the fastest endangered species comebacks on record. In the mid 1990s, to hasten the overall pace of wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies, USFWS released 66 wolves into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho. FWP began monitoring the wolf population, and managing livestock conflicts in 2004. After several court challenges wolves were successfully delisted in May 2011.

FWP's report is part of the annual federal recovery update required by USFWS. The end of 2012 wolf population estimates for the northern Rocky Mountains—which will include wolves that inhabit Wyoming, Idaho and information about wolves in Yellowstone National Park—is expected to be available second week of April from the USFWS online at <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

The delisting of wolves in 2011 allows Montana to manage wolves in a manner similar to how bears, mountain lions and other wildlife species are managed, which is guided by state management plans, administrative rules, and laws.

To learn more about Montana's wolf population, visit FWP online at fwp.mt.gov. Click [Montana Wolves](#).

-fwp-

Q&A: 2012-13 WOLF HUNTING & TRAPPING SEASONS

Q. How many wolves were harvested during the 2012-13 hunting and trapping season?

A. The total harvest was of 225 wolves, 36 percent more than last season. Hunters took 128 wolves and trappers 97.

Q. How long were the hunting and trapping seasons?

A. The hunting season ran 181 days from Sept. 1, 2012 through Feb. 28, 2013. The 76-day trapping season opened Dec. 15, 2012 and closed Feb. 28, 2013.

Q. Will the final 2012 minimum wolf population estimate incorporate the results of the entire 2012-13 hunting and trapping season?

A. No. The verified minimum count is for the Jan. 1-Dec. 31 2012 calendar year. A total of 95 wolves taken by hunters and trappers after Dec. 31, 2012 are not included in the 2012 minimum count, but will be considered in the minimum counts for the 2013 calendar year.

Q. Were the seasons successful?

A. Yes. FWP officials are generally pleased with the results. The overall harvest of 225 wolves this season reflects the increased opportunities for harvest that were incorporated into the 2012-13 seasons.

Q. There's been much discussed about the effectiveness of hunting and trapping in Montana's overall wolf management program. How well did hunters and trappers perform over the past season?

A. The combined harvest of hunters and trappers together continues to grow. Hunters and trappers are the core of Montana's wildlife conservation program and are helping to manage Montana's most recently recovered native species. They're spending the time to learn about wolf behavior to increase their effectiveness in harvesting wolves.

Q. What makes hunters and trappers so engaged?

A. It's all in the numbers. A total of 18,889 wolf hunting licenses were purchased for the past season—246 by nonresidents. Additionally, more than 2,400 prospective wolf trappers participated in mandatory educational certification classes held by FWP last fall. About 1,500 of the certified trappers purchased trapping licenses. In all, 84 wolves were taken between Sept. 1, 2012 and the end of Montana's general big game hunting season, which closed Nov. 25, 2012. About 76 percent of the 84 wolves taken before Nov. 25 were taken opportunistically by hunters who were in the field hunting another species. The majority of the overall harvest, however, took place after the general hunting season by hunters and trappers who were exclusively seeking wolves.

Q. Do you think that the wolf population is now in balance?

A. Confirmed livestock loss has been on a general downward trend since 2009, and we have more tools now for affecting wolf populations. In some areas, where hunting, trapping and

livestock–depredation removals have been effective, it looks like the wolf population's growth has been curbed this year. In other areas the population may be leveling off, but we have more work to do. There are still places where we need to manage for a better balance among other Montana wildlife and with Montana's livestock producers.

Q. How many wolves would come closer to the balance you talk about?

A. We are not yet sure what number of wolves will ultimately be considered the right number for Montana. Montanans have demonstrated there is a place in Montana for wolves and have worked for nearly a generation to make room for them. Montanans, in no small measure due to the state's unique private and public landownership patterns, and perhaps more than the citizens of other states, have had a direct hand in helping to recover the wolf. And while it would be an extraordinary success story for any wildlife species, the wolf's recovery hasn't been pain free for the people who live and work here. Wolves are now a part of this state's wildlife ecology and FWP is committed to managing a recovered population. FWP's legal mandate includes working on behalf of the citizens of Montana to determine what number of wolves will best fit with the other wildlife species they will share the landscape with and public tolerance, including that of landowners. FWP will continue to use reasonable tools to optimize harvest opportunities until Montana reaches an acceptable number of wolves.

Q. Can you get there with hunting and trapping alone?

A. While wolf harvest has increased each of the last three seasons, it remains to be seen how or if hunting and trapping can reduce the state's wolf population in areas where that needs to be accomplished. This year FWP sought and received from the 2013 Montana Legislature additional tools to increase the wolf harvest in the future. The wolf management bill won swift and overwhelming bipartisan legislative support and was signed into law on Feb. 13 by Gov. Steve Bullock. The new law immediately allowed hunters to purchase up to three wolf licenses and lowered the price of a nonresident wolf license from \$350 to \$50. The new law also allows wolf hunters to use their license after 24 hours of purchase, instead of after a five-day wait; authorizes the use of electronic calls; and removes the requirement for wolf hunters to wear hunter-orange after the general deer and elk hunting seasons have ended.

Q. Can you explain why some wolves are equipped with radio collars?

A. About 50 wolves in Montana are now equipped with radio collars to allow wolf biologists and technicians to remotely keep track of the movement patterns of wolf packs and individual animals from the air and from the ground. Over the course of the past year, FWP researchers collared 24 wolves and federal Wildlife Services collared 14. Wildlife Services, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides federal support in managing problems caused by wildlife.

Q. Sounds expensive.

A. It is. Last year the equipment alone cost nearly \$12,000. FWP purchased 24 new collars and refurbished 15 others.

Q. It's clear some collared animals are taken by hunters. Why go to the expense and trouble if the wolves are harvested?

A. FWP wildlife biologists use radio collars for a variety of scientific research projects. FWP equips wildlife with collars to track movements, obtain counts, study reproduction rates and predator-prey relationships and to help researchers learn more about how, where, and why mortalities occur. In Montana, we acknowledge that the practice is time-intensive and expensive and that some collared wolves, like other animals FWP collars, will die. Hunting and trapping mortality rates are important for managers to know and are determined in part from the harvest of radio collared animals. All of this is consistent with wildlife management programs that primarily focus at the population level not on individual animals.

Q. Okay, but won't FWP manage wolves differently near Yellowstone and Glacier national parks?

A. Montana's new wolf management legislation allows FWP to close areas near national parks only after established wolf harvest quotas are met. In each of the past three wolf hunting seasons, FWP established conservative quotas in wolf management units near the national parks. Also, in signing the new legislation, Gov. Steve Bullock asked FWP to ramp up educational efforts aimed at averting the harvest of collared and heavily studied wolves near national parks.

Q. Will that resolve the issue of protecting wolves that inhabit national parks?

A. The two national parks were essentially incubators for the successful wolf recovery. Neither park, however, functions independent of the ecosystems in which they are only a part. The

wolves were introduced to Yellowstone National Park, as a "nonessential experimental" population, in large part to repopulate Montana and Wyoming. Wolves introduced to YNP successfully colonized Montana by migrating north and wolves that migrated naturally from Canada to Glacier National Park migrated farther south into Montana. Such connected corridors are essential because they allow wolves to travel about freely to join existing packs or form new packs. This in part ensures the genetic diversity of wolves throughout the region. Wolves, like other species, do not recognize human-drawn boundaries. The wolves that depart the national parks—just like bison, elk and other wildlife—do so to exploit resources that aren't available to them in the parks. Fortunately, the success of the species at the current robust population levels is not dependent upon the survival of specific individual animals. Rather, management in Montana is directed at the population level and all indications are that the Montana wolf population is very healthy.

-fwp-

2012 Montana Wolf Hunting Season Report



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

About the Wolf Season

- ❖ Season closed Feb. 28; 225 wolves harvested.
- ❖ Hunters took 128 wolves and trappers took 97.
- ❖ Season modifications
 - Nov. 8, a new regulation to minimize non-target captures required a minimum 8 lb. trap pan tension in Regions 1 & 2.
 - Feb. 13, House Bill 73 becomes law and hunters permitted to purchase up to 3 wolf licenses.

❖ Wolf Management Unit harvests:

WMU	Hunter	Trapper	Total
100	9	11	20
101	8	18	26
110 (quota 2)	1		1
121	10	7	17
130	11	5	16
150	3		3
200	10	11	21
210	3	4	7
250	8	8	16
280	4		4
290	5	12	17
310	19	3	22
316 (quota 3)	2		2
320	3		3
330	5		5
390	22	4	26
400	5	14	19
Total	128	97	225

Wolf Hunting

- ❖ 123 resident and 3 nonresident hunters harvested wolves.
 - 64 of 84 wolves (76%) taken during Archery/General season were taken opportunistically.
- ❖ 45 percent of hunters used calls.
- ❖ Avg. Distance Shot: 110 yards.
- ❖ Number bagged:
 - 124 hunters took 1 wolf.
 - 2 hunters took 2 wolves.
 - No hunters took 3 wolves.
- ❖ One hunter harvested a wolf with archery equipment.
- ❖ 18,889 wolf licenses were issued (18,642 resident; 247 nonresident).

- ❖ 74 residents and 12 nonresidents purchased additional wolf hunting licenses after the Feb. 13 law change.
- ❖ Approximately 15% of resident deer and elk hunters purchased a wolf license.
- ❖ License cost: \$19 Resident; \$350/(\$50 after February 13) Non-Resident
- ❖ Total hunting license revenue \$437,048

Wolf Trapping

- ❖ 2,414 trappers completed the Wolf Trapper Education course and were certified to trap wolves in Montana; approximately 1,500 purchased a trapping license.
- ❖ 62 trappers took one wolf.
- ❖ 13 trappers took 2 wolves.
- ❖ 3 trappers took 3 wolves.

Harvested Wolves

- ❖ 48% on federal land; 3% on state land; 37% on private land.
- ❖ Wolves were harvested from approximately 60 different packs.

Age & Sex

- ❖ Adult 123; 55 percent
- ❖ Juvenile 44; 20 percent
- ❖ Yearling 30; 13 percent
- ❖ Unknown 28; 12 percent
- ❖ 117 Females
- ❖ 108 Males

Avg. Weight

- ❖ Adult avg. 84 lbs.; max 120 lbs.
- ❖ Juvenile avg. 72 lbs.; max 100 lbs.

Color

- ❖ Black 53
- ❖ Gray 141
- ❖ Unknown 28
- ❖ White 3

Reported Health

- ❖ 21 with one or combination of mange, worn or broken teeth, fleas, worms, gashes, injuries to paws or legs, and one with a bobbed tail.

2012 Montana Wolf Hunting Season Report



2012 Gray Wolf Hunting Season Harvest Locations

Of the statewide harvest, 84 percent came from:

The other counties include:

County	Hunter	Trapper	Total
Lincoln	14	24	38
Park	20	4	24
Missoula	11	11	22
Sanders	11	7	18
Flathead	11	6	17
Gallatin	17		17
L & C	8	8	16
Ravalli	6	8	14
Powell	5	7	12
Mineral	6	6	12

County	Hunter	Trapper	Total
Lake	3	4	7
Beaverhead	7		7
Teton	1	5	6
Madison	3	3	6
Granite	2	2	4
Jefferson	1		1
Silver Bow		1	1
Carbon	1		1
Pondera		1	1
Deer Lodge	1		1

Harvest Locations from 9/1/2012 through 2/28/2013

